

Jesus at the Wedding in Cana

Rev. R. Kattenberg – John 2: 11

Sing: Psalter 306
Read: Genesis 49: 8-12
John 2: 1-12
Sing: Psalter 395
Sing: Psalter 259: 1, 2
Sing: Psalter 34:2

Congregation, with the help of the Lord, I bring to you today the Word of God from John 2, verse 11:

'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.'

This passage speaks to us about Jesus at the wedding in Cana.

We will consider, in turn,

1. The beginning of miracles
2. The manifestation or showing of His glory
3. The belief of His disciples on Him

1. The beginning of miracles

Does it not surprise you that Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding? Did you expect that? No, perhaps not. His coming into our world is explicitly about His glory, His majesty, His honor, and His work, is it not? And at the core, was it not about His atonement? Certainly! It is for that reason that Jesus reveals Himself precisely at the wedding in Cana as the Savior of the world, as the Redeemer of sinners. They must come to Him to receive grace. In Cana, He also shows who He is and what His work will be. He says there as it were: 'Behold, here I am!'

We may know the chapter John 2 well, but it has never struck us how remarkable John's words are: *'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.'* If you had been given the opportunity to choose a fitting circumstance for a miracle, you might have pointed to the Lord Jesus healing a sick man.

Children, perhaps your mom is sick, and you may pray, 'Lord Jesus, please make my mom better again.' If such a thing happens, how amazed people would be! Parents, you often pray for your children, maybe even for those who no longer desire to be in church. You might ask, 'Lord Jesus, convert my children so they will love Thee.' Or perhaps you have an elderly mother, and you are painfully aware, in her case, it has become: the older, the colder. You would wish that the Lord would perform a miracle for her so that if she dies, she would not enter into eternity without a testimony of faith.

Congregation, wouldn't those be great miracles? Wouldn't people everywhere be talking about it? And wouldn't the honor of the Lord be promoted with that? Certainly!

However, Jesus performs His first miracle at a wedding. The first sign He accomplishes is turning water into wine! If we compare that miracle with the acts of grace I just mentioned, you might say, 'Well, that pales in comparison to what we had in mind. Turning water into wine, what good is that, really? He had better gone to that man in Bethesda who has been sick for thirty-eight years...'

No, Jesus doesn't go to Bethesda for His first miracle. He also doesn't go to the man born blind who has never seen the light and begs for his livelihood. Then perhaps He is going to that Samaritan woman with her troubled and sinful life? No! Though Jesus doesn't go to them first, although He will go to them later. They are not forgotten. They all have their place in the Holy Scripture.

Congregation, the first miracle that Jesus performed, took place at a wedding! It may be a bit confusing at first glance. Of course, we understand the tension the bridal couple finds themselves in as the wine runs out at their wedding. A wedding in Israel was not a one-day event but a week-long celebration. So, a lot is needed to continually provide the guests with what they need. Naturally, we empathize with the bridal couple. It would be sad to announce that the wine has run out at the feast. Although we can think about more serious things, yet we can understand the unpleasantness of such an announcement. The bride and groom, we realize, will always be remembered for this. People in their village may have often said, 'Look, those are the people who didn't stock enough wine. They must not have been able to afford it.' The bridal couple may have often been somewhat put to shame. But is that such a big deal? Compare that with the plight, for example, of the Samaritan woman with her troubled and sinful life! But the Lord Jesus doesn't care about our opinions on what miracle should be worked first.

John, the evangelist, is glad he can write down this miracle at the wedding as the beginning of signs. Later, John will mention the raising of Lazarus from the dead as the last sign. That is the seventh miracle that John describes.

But, congregation, what was actually the very first real miracle of the Lord Jesus? John points to it in the first chapter when he says, '*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*' This is fundamentally the first and the most significant sign. The Lord Jesus's

appearance is one continuous miracle from beginning to end. In it, He reveals the Father's glory!

John calls the first miracle in Cana 'the beginning of miracles.' Do not make a mistake here. He doesn't mean that it's just a start as if the Lord Jesus still needs to try it out. No! It says 'beginning.' That means it is the principle or the place where it all began. It defines the entire character of His appearance. The revelation of His glory in this sign is so great that at the end of its description, we read: *'And His disciples believed in Him...'*

John writes in the twentieth chapter, almost at the end of his Gospel: *'And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.'*

Why is the story of the wedding at Cana in the Bible? Congregation, when I preach to you on this miracle, God is seeking your salvation. The Lord has this miracle preached to you – and I say it with the words of John – *'That ye might believe.'* So that you may fear the Lord and love the Lord Jesus.

You might ask, 'Is the Lord seeking my salvation through what happened at the wedding at Cana?' Yes, because the Holy Spirit says: *'That ye might believe.'* So that you may surrender to God for the first time or again. It is not just a story that you can preach about only in a wedding service. This miracle is the message of God's grace. It is the proclamation of salvation through the blood of the Lamb of God, of the richness of God's grace.

You say, 'How? You're making me curious.' Keep listening attentively, for, by God's grace, you will see our God's greatness and grace in this story. Boys and girls, in the preaching on this miracle the Lord aims at your heart. God states with this beginning of signs: I am willing to be your God! The Lord Jesus says: 'I am come to be your Savior!'

Congregation, the Holy Spirit offers you the grace of our Lord Jesus for your sinful life. He desires to penetrate the depths of your heart. Sing it: *'Search me, O God, and know my heart, Try me, my thoughts to know; O lead me, if in sin I stray, In paths of life to go'* (Psalter 139:5).

Congregation, there is more in this Bible story that makes us ponder Jesus' actions. The first was that Jesus goes to a wedding, but then the unthinkable occurs: the wine runs out. Why that happens is not stated. Maybe the bridal couple thought, 'With the Lord Jesus and His disciples as guests, we don't need to worry about wine. These people are different from ordinary society. They may abstain from wine.' The disciples of the Lord Jesus largely came from John the Baptist, who was that strict Nazarene who only ate locusts and wild honey. Well, the company of the Lord Jesus must be the same. Yes, that's what some may have thought, but it doesn't match reality. In Luke 7, we read: *'For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come*

eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' Wine was the standard drink of those days. Just as we drink tea and coffee, they drank wine back then. Like the other guests, the Lord Jesus drinks the wine with His disciples. Even though Jesus and the disciples also partook, the guests undoubtedly exercised moderation in the holy presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. For sure, there was not any drunkenness going on, otherwise the Lord Jesus would not have wanted to be there.

Yet, at a certain point the vessels containing the wine were empty. They have run out of wine. From experience, you know where something is being consumed, and there is no replenishment; it eventually runs out. This is also the case here. Shortly, the master of the feast will have to say, 'Sorry, we've run out of wine.'

Congregation, allow me to say something blunt here. It might be that at this point a very spiritually edifying thought comes to your mind, like this: 'Yes, now we understand. Now we comprehend why the wine had to run out. It was that at this point the Lord Jesus will rise and say, 'Dear people, we have eaten, we have drunk, the wine is finished. This is the sign from heaven that we must end the ordinary celebration and turn our attention to other things.' And we fancy that the Lord Jesus would then preach about the wine of the Kingdom of God. A spiritual lesson based on this earthly, natural incident. He could ask the wedding guests, 'Have you ever drunk of the heavenly wine?' The Lord Jesus would at this point transition from the natural to the spiritual.

Don't we do that sometimes? We often shift from ordinary daily bread to the spiritual and say, 'Fortunately, there is still the Bread of Life.' When someone can no longer eat, we say, 'If only you could eat of the Bread of Life, then it would be well with you.' Such occasions provide an opportunity to shift the conversation from the natural to the spiritual.

But that's not how the Lord Jesus does it. We thought we had found a splendid solution. People would sit down neatly, and the Lord Jesus would say, 'Now think about your relationship with God.' This is how we sometimes try to make the Word of God spiritual, we try to spiritualize it.

But congregation, is the Word itself not spiritual? And are not the words spoken by the Lord Jesus the words of eternal life? Hebrews 4 states: '*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.*' It does not say: 'It becomes alive and powerful someday.' But: 'it is alive and powerful.' When? Today! Now!

'Yes, but the Word of God needs to be made powerful in my life, isn't it?' Congregation, the Word is powerful! Why, then, has it not accomplished its work in your life? Because of your resistance, because you are dead in trespasses and sins. You resist the power of the Word.

The Word does not need to become alive. Could a minister of the Word make it alive so that you say, 'Yes, now it becomes alive for me?' No, the Word is a living matter. The Living Word is full of grace, majesty, and glory. We don't need to spiritualize it at all. The Word of

God is Spirit and Life. I hope you come to different thoughts at the end of the sermon. Please learn to see the richness of the Word as it lies before us in all its simplicity.

Congregation, writing on this miracle is for John a very joyful thing. When he writes that Jesus turns water into wine, it is, for him, preaching the Gospel par excellence. It is the most joyful message that John can imagine. Do you know why? Well, it is clear that salvation is possible even for the greatest of sinners. Now, grace is rich and free. Because this is what the miraculous sign in Cana represents: it shows that, *'He has remembered all His mercy, His truth declared to Israel; The ends of earth have seen His glory; His ways in majesty excel'* (Psalter 424:2). Here we hear the joyful message as it also resounded in the fields of Ephrathah: *'For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people'* (Luke 2:10). God is fulfilling His promise.

This miraculous sign at Cana signifies that the Messiah has come! Jesus turns water into wine in Cana. Now let the trumpet of salvation sound, and let the trumpet of the Gospel be put to the mouth! Let it be heard to the ends of the earth: 'Ye people, there is hope with God! Grace is abundant with this Lord and this King!' At the wedding in Cana, Jesus turns water into wine and thus it resounds: *'Who is simple? Let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she says to him: Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled'* (Proverbs 9:4,5).

Perhaps you still think: 'What is this passage's deep and rich meaning? And why did we read that passage from Genesis 49? What does that have to do with the wedding at Cana?'

In Genesis 49, the Holy Spirit pulls back something of the veil. Can you see the connection? Here it is: in Genesis 49, we find ourselves at the deathbed of Father Jacob. He is about to die, and his sons must all come to his bedside. Each receives a separate blessing from Jacob, from Reuben to Joseph. But who receives the blessing of the coming Messiah? Who hears that the promise of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is placed upon him? Judah!

Children at school have probably had to learn the following text by heart: *'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise'* (Genesis 49:8). Judah will be the bearer of the promise. Then Jacob adds: *'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be'* (Genesis 49:10). This points to the coming of the Messiah from the tribe of Judah. But the blessing of Jacob for Judah does not stop there. The Holy Spirit continues. Then comes this: *'Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk'* (Genesis 49:11,12).

As Jesus turned water into wine, it is easy to know which word in Jacob's blessing we should underline. It is the word 'wine.' When the Messiah comes, it will be all about wine. Wine and more wine! That is the sign that God has given from ancient times, from the

deathbed of Jacob. Remember, when the Messiah comes, and the promise to Judah is fulfilled, it will be a matter of the vine, the choicest vine, wine, and the blood of grapes.

See now! The first miracle Jesus performs is turning water into wine. Let then the bell of the Gospel ring! The promise to Judah, that word from ancient times, is fulfilled! Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear, and whoever has eyes to see, see what happens at the wedding in Cana. Here, Jesus says: 'I am He. I am the long-awaited Messiah. God has remembered His promise of grace. People, you can be saved.' The abundance of wine proclaims to us that the time of salvation has come. Full joy breaks through with the coming of the promised Messiah. The time of redemption has come: Immanuel, God with us. Yes, then we look at this story differently. The Holy Spirit proclaims: 'This is a sign: when water is turned into wine.' This has been prophesied from ancient times! Now God fulfills His promises! You may know it: The Savior has come in His love, seeking sinners. The Kingdom of God has come. 'Come, there is room with Me!' God makes it known: Immanuel, God with us, in affliction, in death, in cares, in sin, in sorrow, and in trouble.

He is also present when the bridal couple faces an embarrassing situation. He has become fully human and has taken on our nature. He has heart and eyes for all cares and all our sins. It is He who, in our lowly state, graciously offers us His hand.

Ponder this and see clearly that we are dealing with salvation history here. Not with some nice short story. See its depth. Hear the song: God has remembered His salvation and His grace because His Kingdom is breaking through.

Congregation, a moment ago, we thought that the Lord Jesus had better gone somewhere else, but as we compare Scripture with Scripture, and the Holy Spirit interprets the Scripture, we begin to fathom its depth. We then see that God reveals grace even to the greatest of sinners.

It is also noteworthy that the Lord Jesus does not command the water to be turned into wine. There is no mention of Jesus going to those vessels and saying, 'Water, become wine.' No! He simply says, '*Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.*' That's all! In this, He shows His power, His glory, and His being the Messiah. He is the One! He, the Son of God, the Almighty.

Do we still reckon with His power? Time and again, we encounter the power of sin in our lives and are troubled by that. You often hear it said, 'God has to do it, right?' Yes, that is true. God has to do it. But, from this account of the wedding at Cana, you may hear that God indeed does it. He creates abundance.

You say, 'I have nothing.' No, but you cannot be saved even with what you would have. You need Him who creates an abundance of wine at the wedding in Cana. With Him you can find refuge. The acceptable year of the Lord has come. The richness of God's grace is

revealed. The door of the Kingdom is opened. The invitation goes out to the ends of the earth. There is hope with God!

Congregation, is this maybe what you're worrying about? Are you stuck in doubt and can't get out of it? The devil tightens the chains a bit more and says, 'You'll never experience release. Look at your sin-filled life, your wretched existence!' But still, the plea arises: 'Lord, help!' *'Lord, save us, we perish'* (Matthew 8:25). Are you pressed from all sides? Can you not imagine that things with your sinful and corrupt life can ever be different? Do you cry out, *'Myriad woes beset my heart, Myriad doubts, and bitternesses; Thou who my Deliverer art, Bring me out of my distresses'* (Psalter 415:8)?

The bridal couple in Cana knew about that, too. They had their worries and needs as well. They also faced an impossible situation in their lives. Do you too? Do you sigh, *'With my burden of transgression, Heavy laden, overborne, Humbled low I make confession, For my folly now I mourn'* (Psalter 102:3)? So many other things can weigh us down. Everything can go wrong in your life: trials and loneliness, trouble and care, and so much more.

Has your life become an impossible burden? Trials and loneliness, trouble and care? Just sigh: *'Give Thou Thy help against the foe, For help of man is vain'* (Psalter 158:8). Satan wants to silence you and make you believe that salvation is impossible for you. He wants to lead you astray on paths of death and drag you into an abyss of doom. He says, 'Just a little more, and I'll drag you in, and you'll never get out.' Darkness takes hold of your heart, and it seems like you are being dragged into the depths of the abyss. That is Satan's work!

And what does Jesus do, congregation? He turns water into wine so you may understand: *'For with God nothing shall be impossible'* (Luke 1:37). You can turn to Him. He stands with you, in the midst of your needs, and says, 'Behold, here I am. I am come that those who believe on Me might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.' Did you think this Messiah, this Lord and King, is thrifty and life in the Kingdom of Heaven is meager? Do you think you do Him justice when you think small of Him? Congregation, don't go along with this unbelief; don't let anyone lead you astray.

The door of the Gospel opens wide here in Cana. Worldwide even! With Him is richness and abundance. No, this is not to make you think that eternity is not a serious thing about which you don't have to worry. Then you make a grave mistake. But here in Cana, it sounds: *'Call to mind, O Lord Jehovah, Tender mercies manifold, And Thy store of lovingkindness, Which has ever been of old'* (Psalter 415:3).

By His divine power, the Lord Jesus brings renewal and transformation. It is a new creation. Cana is a sign for all who are discouraged, for all who are troubled, and for all who are on the brink of perishing. For people who have lost hope and shake their heads in despair, saying, 'Oh Lord, what now?' As we contemplate this Word of the Lord, you cannot remain desperate. No matter how far you have strayed and how many sins you have committed, Cana points to help and salvation.

You may say, 'Seeing that I'm walking on the edge of the abyss, that I'm about to perish, then there isn't hope anymore, is there? Then it is too late, isn't it?' Oh, direct your gaze to Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine. It preaches that the floodgates of God's grace, the rich grace of the Savior, open so wide that it is actually beyond words.

We're going to sing of the riches of God's grace from Psalter 259:1, 2:

Verse 1

*Sing to the Lord, sing His praise, all ye peoples,
New be your song as new honors ye pay;
Sing of His majesty, bless Him forever,
Show His salvation from day to day.*

Verse 2

*Tell of His wondrous works, tell of His glory,
Till through the nations His Name is revered;
Praise and exalt Him, for He is almighty,
God over all let the Lord be feared.*

2. The Revelation of His Glory

Congregation, there are quite a few numbers mentioned in this passage of Scripture. What is the reason for that? Well, God places the magnitude of your sin against the richness of His grace. Those numbers are not there for no reason. John did not without reason mention that there were six stone water jars, each holding two to three measures. No, this is the Gospel message! A measure is approximately 36 liters. Rounding it off, we get about five hundred liters of wine. Five hundred! What abundance!! The Messiah is here! The grace of God makes way! The glory of the Kingdom reveals itself while just a moment ago, we considered whether there would still be salvation for this or that sinner. And whether there is grace for you and me.

Congregation, you don't need to harbor that fear at all. From the Lord, you may expect much; you may expect everything. Indeed, it is undeserved. You cannot say, 'We are entitled to it.' No, the Lord does not inquire about your merits or claims; His grace comes from above, in all its glory and richness.

So, this wedding in Cana is a clear sign of our God's generosity, majesty, and abundance. You can never speak too highly about the abundance of God's grace. You can indeed speak wrongly about it. You can say, 'Oh well, then it's not that bad with me after all.' You can also be accused of Arminianism. We must be honest. God proclaims His wealth here so you will know it is possible! There is grace and salvation with the Lord. It may be impossible

for us, but not from God's side. Cana preaches: *'With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible'* (Mark 10:27).

'God must do it,' you say. That is true, but He does it. If you leave out that fact, you undermine the Gospel. Again, God must do it, and He does it too. The Lord shows at the wedding that He fulfills His Word. The old word Jacob spoke over Judah; wine as a sign of the coming Kingdom becomes true here. 'You see,' says God, 'you can trust Me. The time of salvation has come. It is the acceptable year of the Lord.' *'the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness'* (Isaiah 6:3).

Here is a rich Savior for poor sinners, for someone like you, adults, and like you, young people. He freely gives from His wealth of grace. Generously and abundantly. By giving, He does not become poorer. On the contrary! The more He gives, the more He shines as a Savior. The more subjects, the greater the glory of the King. There is no end to His supply. It is infinite!

So, an invitation goes out from Cana. Come, will not this Word break your heart? Perhaps you find it comfortable to think sparingly about God's grace. Then, you can easily dismiss the matter and say, 'God must do it.' But now God corners you so that you will receive the mercy blow and, through that, receive life, everlasting life.

What abundance! Let that break your heart! Will that not be an encouragement to your heart? Look at how He stretches out His arms. A sure proof that He will receive you! Five hundred liters! What abundance!

Congregation, now a step further: Where does that richness come from? How can that be? How is it that the Lord Jesus reveals His glory like this and displays the richness of grace? Congregation, this event is profoundly significant. For on this word of John hangs the blood of the Lamb of God. When Jesus does this sign here, turning water into wine, you hear the cry on Golgotha: 'I thirst! I thirst!' Do you see this message of grace is connected to the blood of the Lamb of God? When we see those five hundred liters of wine, we see the Cross of Christ in those jars. You hear His cry on Golgotha: 'I thirst!' The gospel of suffering, which began in the manger, breaks through via Cana and goes up to Golgotha.

This is not just a story but salvation history leading to Golgotha, where the cursed wood stands erected. *'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'* (Galatians 6:14), confesses Paul. We always end up at the suffering and death of Jesus. There, the richness of God's grace flourishes.

What happens here in Cana is a down payment on what Jesus receives as a reward for His work. Here, He shows His sign so that you may believe in Him and so that, believing in His name, you may have life everlasting. He is the Savior of sinners.

In the Bible, wine is the sign of the new. It is a sign of joy. And as Jesus begins His ministry here in Cana, a new era dawns. A time of rejoicing and joy. The angel had already proclaimed it in the fields of Ephrata: *"For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* Come with me to Cana, there you will see it—the beginning of the signs.

The poet in Scripture sings: *"Wine that maketh glad the heart of man"* (Psalm 104:15). Amos sings: *"The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt"* (Amos 9:13). And Micah spoke: *"But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree"* (Micah 4:4). So it is in the Kingdom of God. The light shines on our Lord and our King. He is also willing to be your Savior today. He is able and willing to pay your life's debt and reconcile you with God. And though Satan may assail the richness of God's grace, the sign in Cana shows: "Here He is!" He now says to you: "What can I do for you?" In doubt and temptation, in need and in death, in affliction and strife, here is the infallible picture of the Gospel of the grace of God.

We may view this text against the backdrop of Golgotha, the cross, the gospel of suffering. In that light, we see the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

Finally, our third point:

3. The faith of His disciples

'And His disciples believed on Him.' Did they not believe in Him before? Yes, but they still had much to learn. What does the Holy Spirit mean by *"And His disciples believed on Him"*? Well, the disciples were men who lived by the Word of God. They were well-versed in the Scriptures. They were following Jesus on His authoritative word. Could He be the promised Messiah? The disciples were privileged to go along to Cana. They knew the words of Father Jacob on his deathbed. When the Messiah comes, it will be all about wine. Wine and more wine! Here in Cana, they are confirmed in their faith. He is the promised Messiah.

Do you see those disciples standing there? They nudge each other: 'Water! Wine! Five hundred liters of wine! He is the Messiah. This is the sign of His glory. This is grace. O God, how good Thou art to sinful people.'

This majestic sign strengthens the faith of the disciples. They understood that sign because they lived by the Scriptures. *"This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation"* (Isaiah 25:9). Their faith blossoms.

You might wonder: 'How should my faith grow in the Lord Jesus Christ?' Don't expect it from extraordinary things; don't expect voices or signs. The disciples lived by the Word. If you dig into the Word, congregation, the Holy Spirit will ensure that it is blessed to your heart,

so you can say: 'Thanks be unto Thee, oh Lord. Thou art my God.' Then He says: 'I am thy salvation.' Sing then: '*I put my trust in God alone, Forevermore I trust His grace*' (Psalter 145:5).

Perhaps you are still standing at a distance and have many questions. Remember, '*Grace and truth shall mark the way, Where the Lord His own will lead*' (Psalter 68:1). This story also shows us that there are different degrees of faith. A beginning faith may be weak faith, but it is faith. This story is precisely in the Bible for you: '*that you might believe*' (John 20:31). So that you may surrender to the Lord. So that you may say: 'Lord, I have always thought too little of Thee.'

With the great Bridegroom of Cana, the Bridegroom with a capital letter, there is an abundance for all your needs. He is the Light for your darkness. He is our life. Look how He strengthens the faith of His disciples. Truly, it is to Him that we should turn.

The disciples fade away, the bridal couple fade away, but there is One who remains. Jesus. Him alone!

Amen.

Closing Psalter 34:2